DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 587 FL 800 478

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TITLE Literacy, Knowledge, Power, and Development--Multiple Connections.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at a workshop on "People Empowerment: Challenges for Access in the Developing World" (Bloomington, IN, March 5-6, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Literacy; *Developing Nations; *Economic Development; Epistemology; Folk Culture; Global Approach; Indigenous Populations; *Literacy Education; *Personal Autonomy; *Power Structure; Relevance (Education); *Social Values; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Development must offer people not only release from poverty but also social esteem and political freedom. While knowledge production has exploded, its distribution and use is still limited, especially in the Third World. Literacy is the most promising means of bringing information and technology to common people in developing nations. Each country carries out development in its own context and by its own values, but development is also a global concern. Individual power can be viewed as the universal human need and the differentiated individual capacity to affect both material and symbolic environments. However, power is unequally distributed. Empowerment is the process whereby the powerless: (1) acquire critical consciousness about their individual reality; and (2) organize to multiply individual into collective power. A challenge to most developing countries is to retrieve and renew usable knowledge from indigenous traditions and connect it with new scientific and technical knowledge. The print and electronic media of mass culture do not always serve the knowledge needs of these populations. Education can be brought to them through traditional and nontraditional means. Adult literacy is potential power, but just as development must be appropriate to yield the desired results, literacy education must also be appropriately defined and designed. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (MSE)

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LITERACY, KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND DEVELOPMENT -- MULTIPLE CONNECTIONS

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This paper was presented at the panel, "Challenges for Access to Information and Technology," organized as part of the Workshop entitled, People Empowerment: Challenges for Access in the Developing World, organized by the Access to Resources Group, Indiana Center on Global Change and World Peace, Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana, March 5-6, 1992.

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LITERACY, KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND DEVELOPMENT --

MULTIPLE CONNECTIONS

SUBSTANCE AND STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The argument about multiple connections between and among literacy, knowledge, power and development is structured thus:

Development as conceptualized today must offer people not only release from the cruel burdens of poverty, but must also bring them social esteem and political freedom. Just distributions of economic goods, social privileges, and political rights arise from an underlying set of power relationships among people that make possible free and democratic choice by individuals and communities in a society.

Choice to be meaningful has to be informed choice. Therefore, for development to be meaningful, the power to choose must be democratized and linked with the democratization of knowledge production and use. The new information age has indeed become a reality in our times. Knowledge production has literally exploded. However, the same can not be said about the distribution and utilization of knowledge. There are stark knowledge disparities across and within nations. In most parts of the world, and particularly in the Third World, the poor are also knowledge-poor.

There are two interrelated causes of poverty of knowledge in the Third World. Traditional knowledge indigenous to the Third

World had been discounted and delegitimized under colonialism; and thereby separated from cultural processes of renewal and enrichment necessary for collective knowledge to remain functional. Consequently, indigenous knowledge has been rendered inadequate for meeting the new needs and demands of life in today's world. At the same time, the new knowledge of science and technology produced and disseminated by the formal system of education -- and by no means an unmixed blessing in itself -- has been captured by the urban and rural middle class and other entrenched social interests. This is particularly so in regard to knowledge production and dissemination within higher education and secondary education sectors. Primary education continues on its way to be universalized around the globe but the knowledge content of primary education in the Third World is often too little and is not all relevant. Dropout rates among participants in systems of primary education are a scandal.

Literacy -- including school literacy but, more importantly, adult literacy provided through special out-of-school programs to subsistence farmers and self-employed workers in the informal economy -- seems to be the most promising pathway to information and technology to the common people in the Third World at this particular time of our history. The promise of literacy for the poor and peripheral people of the Third World can be discussed along two lines: (i) literacy as an instrumental good that promises to provide access to knowledge available in print; and (ii) literacy as an inherent good that promises to serve as "potential added" to the individual to make symbolic

transformations of reality in one more dimension -- that is in writing -- and thereby to be able to discharge, in Freire's words, one's ontological vocation of praxis more effectively -- by reading the word and by reading the world (Freire 1970).

NEW VALUES AND NORMS OF DEVELOPMENT

There have been several significant developments in the concept of development during the last forty years or more. Development today is defined as more than merely economic development. Social, political and cultural categories are also part of the development process. Development has become people-centered so that success is measured in terms of what happens in the lives of the common people rather than in terms of the expansion of infrastructures and increments in the size of the Gross National Product (GNP). Naturally, societal development and people empowerment are today discussed in the same breath. There is a demand for creating a set of conditions that would allow people's access to power and thereby to the economic, status and educational rewards typically associated with power in a society. Understandably, the definitions of development proposed in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have become historical oddities. A definition of development quoted in the proceedings of the Unesco conference held in Ullan Bator, Mangolia in 1982 is more to the point in our times:

> Development is integrated: it is an organic process involving a number of economic, social and cultural factors which overlap and constantly influence one another.

Development is endogenous: each country carries out its development according to its own choice, and in conformity with the real values, aspirations and motivations of the population.

Development is global: its objectives and problems are determined with relation to world problems and reflect the general nature of development.... The society in which development is carried out is not isolated, but forms part of the network of relations and forces that cover the entire world, including the most economically advanced societies as well as those which, from the economic point of view, are the most deprived (Unesco 1982:25).

The above definition of development combines perspectives both national and international. It assumes solidarity among the community of nations, all nations working together toward a more humane and just world order. The strong articulation of global concerns in Unesco definition is put in balance by the concept of Human Scale Development: "Such development is focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organized articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state" (Max-Neef, et al. 1989:12).

Recent documentation produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines development as a composite of life expectancy at birth, adult literacy, basic purchasing power

and human freedom (UNDP 1991:14). The most radical advance is the UNDP's definition of development is the incorporation of the political category of human freedom that integrates into itself many other normative themes such as personal autonomy, participation, and democracy. The core definition of development today is emphatically focused on shared power.

OF POWER AND EMPOWERMENT

What is power? How to share it? What are the processes of mutual empowerment? Power, Bertrand Russell said, was a concept as fundamental to social sciences as energy was to physics, and that laws of social dynamics in societies could be stated only in terms of power in its various forms (Russell 1938). This assertion by Russell certainly deserves further theoretical work and some bold social analyses. However, definitions of power have remained narrow, such as, the ability of "A" to influence the behavior of "B" against the wishes and interests of "B" (Cartwright 1959). Useful social analyses of power within human institutions and communities are scant.

Bhola (1975) suggests a wider definition of power "as the universal human need and the differentiated individual capacity to impact on environments both material and symbolic." Thus, to be is to be powerful. However, to be powerful is not to be equally powerful. Some consequences follow:

1. Thus understood power could be experienced without having to be exercised on another, because all environments may not be peopled. Chopping wood or felling a stone to make a trail are both

instances of exercising power -- the need-and-capacity to impact on the material environment.

2. Human beings today live in a material environment confounded by the symbolic -- a consequence of the unique human capacity to engage in symbolic transformations of reality (Langer 1962). Thus, power may involve things deeper than behavioral modifications of individuals in a society; it may involve symbolic transformations of reality that establish the modes and moulds for human imaginings, socialization and behavior. Thus, engaging in Utopian imagination, authoring a constitutional document, and writing an oration for peace or an epic on a distant war are instances of experiencing power in most powerful ways possible.

3. This conception of power enables us to explain not only the negatives of physical force and institutional violence but also such positives of human actions such as "offering the other cheek", renunciation, and self-sacrifice. The power to decide to be powerless (in the old meaning of the word) in search for a higher good in the symbolic-cultural environment is thus explained by the expanded definition of power. Transactions with the self -- our innermost constructed environment -- become examples of the exercise of power.

As stated above, to <u>be</u> is to be <u>powerful</u>, but not to be "equally" powerful. Power is unequally distributed in all societies. Some inequality of power is perhaps essential for relationships of order and compliance to occur and for societal work to get done. However, some distributions of power in

societies can be unjust and cruel. Those in power can reduce the relatively powerless to slavery and deny them even the minimum of the most basic human needs. Hence our present-day concern for people empowerment as part of all development.

THE MEANING OF EMPOWERMENT

A somewhat plain and practical definition of empowerment is "a group process where people who lack an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to, and control over, those resources (Bernard Van Leer Foundation 1990:2). The process of empowering is a combination of the psychological and structural. At one level, empowerment is the process whereby those now powerless in regard to those with power on their lives can acquire a critical consciousness about their individual reality. But empowering is also a structural process whereby the powerless organize themselves to multiply their individual power into collective power and can demand changes in structures surrounding them. The new conception of power offered above should enable us to rise above the categories of power as control and search for better bargains in quid pro quos. We could thereby have new vistas for reflection, socialization and enculturation, new pointers to civil futures, new agendas of hope, new issues for encounters in power. Perhaps instead of greater share of resources for the powerless, we could work toward lower consumptions of resources for everyone -- doing more with less, giving away the unnecessary, liberating not controlling.

KNOWLEDGE AND EMPOWERMENT CONNECTION

The connection between knowledge and power has always been visible to the perceptive. That "Knowledge is power" is part of the collective wisdom in almost all of the world's cultures. The power of the pen has been declared to be stronger than the power of the sword. Violence has, of course, gone Hi-Tech as the Gulf War of February 1991 amply testified.

We live in a world where material reality has indeed been reinvented by the symbolic. Knowledge has exploded as it seeks to codify and collect the current new validated collective constructions of reality. While there has been a stupendous increase in knowledge production, the distribution and utilization of knowledge has not kept pace. Knowledge because it can be stored has become a commodity. As a result nations, institutions and individuals have come to acquire different amounts of knowledge capital. Knowledge disparities between nations and between classes and groups of individuals have brought extreme disadvantages to the knowledge-poor. Lack of knowledge has become a matter of life and death as correlations between literacy and life expectancy at birth and literacy of mother and infant mortality worldwide will show.

Such being the power of knowledge it is obvious that empowering must involve informing. The now peripheral peoples must become knowledgeable to be able to participate as citizens, to name their disadvantage, to make demands on the system, and to exercise choice. Whatever else it may be, empowerment is certainly a process of self-education and growth (Bhola 1984b).

SOURCES AND CHANNELS OF KNOWLEDGE

In talking about sources and channels of knowledge available to people in Third World societies, we can use the following categories: Sources of Indigenous knowledge; Institutions of Mass Culture and Institutions of Education and Extension.

THE STATUS OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

With "colonization of the mind" during the colonial period of which Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) of Kenya talks with such pathos, indigenous knowledge was discounted and delegitimized both by the colonizer and the colonized. With this delegitimization, the indigenous tradition got separated from the cultural processes of renewal and enrichment and in the process a large part of it got fossilized and obfuscated. While lot of exogenous knowledge may be irrelevant to the needs of the Third World communities, it must be recognized that a large part of indigenous knowledge has become inadequate to the new needs and demands of life in the 1990s. The challenge before most Third World communities is to retrieve and renew usable knowledge from the indigenous traditions and connect it with the new scientific and technical knowledge that has become available to the world community (Bhola 1977, 1989). It should be noted that literacy will have to play an important role in connecting indigenous knowledge now carried through the oral tradition with the new scientific and technical knowledge available in print (Thomas and Kondo 1978).

INSTITUTIONS OF MASS CULTURE

While traditional institutions in societies continue to

serve as channels of "old wisdom", the burgeoning institutions of mass culture provide "new wisdom" on new technologies and their possibilities. The newspaper, for example, provides both news and advertisements about goods and services. Of course, the newspaper as a medium of information and technology is not open to the illiterate. The electronic media of radio and television are other important channels of information in the modern world. At one time, it was assumed that radio and television by taking information directly to the listeners and viewers will make literacy unnecessary. These great hopes have been belied. It has become clear that these media have been always been used for entertainment and propaganda and seldom for education. Also, it has been learned that these media do not use orality but instead use "writing read aloud" a kind of print-speak (Bhola 1990a) that the illiterate are unable to fully understand. Thus, the print and electronic media of mass culture have not really served the knowledge needs of the peripheral people of whom we have been talking.

INSTITUTIONS OF EDUCATION AND EXTENSION

Both education and extension can be delivered either through formal or nonformal arrangements. Higher education, vocational and agricultural education for technicians, teacher education, secondary education, and elementary education are all examples of formal education. Formal education is hierarchical, graded, and leads to certification. Extension in agriculture and nutrition, and health care and family planning is typically offered as

nonformal education. It is modular, ungraded and responsive to immediate learning needs of farmers and workers.

Formal Education. Formal education all over the Third World and at all levels of the system is in deep crisis (Coombs 1985). It is well known that in the Third World, higher education has come to serve the role of preparation of the elite needed in the organized sectors of economy and polity and has been fully captured by the middle classes. The same is more or less true about secondary education. Elementary education is perhaps the only sector that has the potential of serving the interests of the poor and disadvantaged. But here again hopes are being belied. Drop-out rates for children of rural parents are high and learning, for those who stay, is minimal. Much fewer girls stay in elementary schools than boys (Coombs 1985).

Alternative Formal Education. Alternative formal education is the label assigned to those educational programs that deliver formal education through alternative means such as correspondence education or distance education using print and electronic media. This sector of education is burgeoning all over the world, but in the Third World, it seems to be availed of much more by urban dwellers than by those living in the rural areas.

Nonformal Education and Development Extension. Nonformal education is education delivered outside the confines of the school. As already indicated nonformal education is neither graded nor tied to certification. It is meant to be responsive to the real needs of people in different contexts at different times. The

most important example of nonformal education is "development extension" carried out to teach agriculture, health and childcare, and to help start income generating activities. Such development extension work is carried out by government agencies as well as non-governmental organizations (NGO's) sponsored by churches or other welfare agencies. Nonformal education is the channel of education and extension that is able to reach and serve the poor and the peripheral. After many decades of experience both educators and extension workers are discovering the limits of education and extension without literacy (Bhola 1990b). They are realizing that there is a limit to the knowledge that can be transmitted to the illiterate in face-to-face nonformal education using folk or electronic media. Adult literacy becoming central to programs of nonformal education and extension.

ADULT LITERACY -- THE PEOPLE'S PATHWAY
TO INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Adult literacy can be justified as the peoples' choice to information and technology in terms of two types of characteristics: (i) its instrumental characteristics in that it can be instrumental in connecting the new literate farmers and workers with the new knowledge which is available only in print; and its inherent characteristics in that in adding a new dimension -- adding writing to speech -- to the human capacity to make symbolic transformation, literacy is "potential added" to human ability to made more effective transactions with all aspects of the environment -- social, economic, political and cultural.

ADULT LITERACY AS AN INSTRUMENTALITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Discussions cast in the format of orality versus literacy have been overtaken by history and become meaningless scholarly exercises. No cultures have survived today that are functioning in orality, and are isolated from print. The communicational reality is that of symbiosis between orality and literacy; and more orality and less literacy in this symbiosis spells disadvantage both at the level of the individual and the society. It is well-nigh impossible to think today of an institution, sacred or secular, that is not rooted in the assumptions of literacy (1990a).

There is yet another somewhat pragmatic justification. Adult literacy is both available and accessible to the peripheral classes that we have been talking about. There are, of course, cases where the entrenched classes, being aware of the liberating consequences of literacy in the interests of the poor classes, have put up resistance in the way of the disadvantaged seeking to become literate. On the other hand, since the entrenched classes are most of them already literate, they are not competing in securing literacy goods for themselves and literacy therefore has not been "captured" by the entrenched classes. This is an important theoretical consideration in behalf of adult literacy in the Third World at this time.

ADULT LITERACY AS "POTENTIAL POWER"

There is a more seminal justification for adult literacy rooted in the inherent characteristics of literacy. In this role, literacy is not merely a vehicle for carting knowledge but an

ontological reintegration of the individual in his or her world. Literacy adds a new dimension to the unique human capacity to make symbolic transformations of reality and thereby make culture. To the dimension of speech is added the new dimension of the written word. Thus, literacy means "potential added" to the individual capacity to make expanded and often more expanded transactions with all aspects of the cultural environment (Bhola 1984b).

NO POTENTIAL WITHOUT APPROPRIATENESS;

NO DIVIDENDS WITHOUT DESIGN

The most serious problem with the theory of "literacy for development" is the ambiguity of its definitions and its failure to demarcate contexts of processes involved. Typical formulations seem to suggest deterministic relationships between literacy and development, suggesting that any form of literacy put to work in any set of conditions will lead to some kind of development. There are, of course, connections between literacy and development both at the individual and structural level. However, to make sure that the consequences are what are expected, the formulations should be qualified: theories should be stated in terms of "appropriate literacy" bringing about "appropriate development consequences" provided that the dynamics of social change in different contexts is appropriately designed and managed.

APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

As was made clear in our discussion of currently held values and norms of development, development is not some standard set of conditions or an agreed upon calculus of means and ends.

Development means different things to different people. Within the frame of our value-and-theory, development will have to be conceived within the community context and will have to be community-based. It will be human scale and sustainable. Development will involve participative processes in setting up developmental agendas. Groups and task groups of men, women, youth and children will work together to plan development agendas and then pool their personal resources to get those agendas achieved. In the process of solution invention, participants will first seek to use indigenous knowledge. Where necessary, participants in development will incorporate appropriate exogenous knowledge on agricultural production, forestry for fuel wood production, ecology, community health, nutrition and child care, family planning, ecology and appropriate technology and disseminate such knowledge among the whole community for use.

APPROPRIATE LITERACY

Appropriate literacy is appropriately-defined literacy. The following questions should be asked: Is the ability of signing one's name enough for some one to be considered literate? Are we taking of school literacy or functional literacy or workplace literacy? Literacy will be in the language of the community. The primers and books developed for use in the community literacy project(s) will be based on language research done in the community by the community and will deal with development topics we have listed above. Literacy skills will be used to codify oral history and oral collective knowledge of the community in agriculture,

herbal medicine, snake bite remedies and so on and so forth.

EFFECTIVE INTERFACES AND DESIGNS

Literacy and development interfaces will not be left to chance but will be planned for from the very beginning. Processes and their contexts will be carefully designed. On the one hand, adult learners will be helped to use their newly acquired literacy skills in dealing with the institutions of government, of banking and credit within the area. On the other hand, the institutions within the community will be asked to translate and organize their uses of literacy on the assumptions of realities in the community and not on the basis of some hypothetical customer who has as much education or more than the Babu in the bank. Appropriate strategies of motivation and organization will be used.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The theoretical argument presented here in behalf of adult literacy as the path of promise for the poor, peripheral communities to resources of information and technology, and thereby to their share of power in societies, is perhaps both coherent and compelling. Historical experiences and present-day endeavors in the world of practice both provide reasons for hope in the future. Experiences of several literacy campaigns in recent years underline the progressive role of adult literacy projects, programs and campaigns in empowering the groups and classes for long excluded from the networks of power (Bhola 1983, 1984a).

Two cautions need to be made:

First, we are not suggesting that access to information and

technology alone, and by itself, will translate into access to power, but suggest only that the former will make the later more probable. Again, we do not suggest that empowering subsistence farmers and workers in the informal economy through literacy and knowledge that it brings will have rooted out all disparities in power relationships throughout the society. After success with the group here identified, divisions and disparities may still prevail both within and without this particular group, based on gender, ethnicity, or other social and cultural categories. It is reasonable to believe, however, that the empowering of this relatively large populations will change the political culture and economic conditions of societies in significant ways.

By way of a second caution, we remind the reader that planned social change is not a phenomenon of natural spontaneous combustion among communities; nor is it a fire lit with analytical documents thrown down from the ivory tower. Behind important endeavors, there are important actors; behind successful campaigns, there are committed campaigners; and behind historic initiatives, there are great leaders. The excluded and the peripheral are not self-sufficient and are not able to campaign for literacy in their own behalf. They need the commitment and competence of some who are willing to make sacrifices for a more just and moral order. The challenge needs to be picked up in a million places around the globe.

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